



**LEIGHTON PARK**  
FOUNDED 1890

## **A New Leaf by Stephanie (Year 9)**

Reedbuck forest has been here forever, a place of mystery and adventure. The trees tower over the sun-bathed path. Small clearings that hold hidden treasures, a family of rabbits or some small brook that children play in while the grown-ups talk. No one ever tells you where the paths go, you find out yourself. Everyone has their own place here, gothy teenagers sulking dramatically in the crooked branches of the beech trees, old couples reminiscing about their youth, small babies learning to walk next to apple trees, laughing at the birds starting to fly.

However, there is one place that everyone knows about, one pocket of woodland that is visited regularly. In the middle of a glade is a tree, towering over the rest of the woods, guarding it from harm. Even the loudest toddlers fall silent at the sight, the clearing is filled with quiet. The oak tree stands proudly in the middle, watching the forest. The trunk is layered with history, small messages left by couples, marks on the branches where swings once swang, grooves that children made over the years to climb up.

This is the place I choose to plant my tree, I walk softly across the clearing, the memories bubbling up like a stream. I listen as the dry leaves crunch under my feet, releasing the musty scent of summer. The moon hangs in the sky, round like a balloon that a child lost and became tangled in the branches of the stars.

I gently place my cargo into the small hole I made in the ground before covering it up, once I'm done I stand up, brushing the dusty earth from my knees. I turn to the tree and grab the lowest branch, my hands and feet moving automatically up the route that I am well accustomed to. Once I'm half-way up I sit, watching the clearing down below. I swing my legs and hold onto the trunk of the tree as a small blustered wind shakes my balance for a moment. "They don't have forests in London, do they?" I startle myself with the statement, the words disrupting the silence.

I'm moving to London in a few days for a degree, I just keep on forgetting about it. I stare one more time at the glade below me, noting with pleasure that my new addition fits in perfectly. I stand up and begin my climb down. When I get down, I pause for a moment, pulled back by the child that spent hours peaking through the branches, the teen that did their maths homework at the base of the tree, afraid of leaving it behind. I turn to the tree and press my forehead gently against it. I close my eyes and for once I just listen. The wind softly shaking the leaves, the creaks of the trees and the rustling bushes. "Look after it" I whisper, "Look after my tree." I smile once "Goodbye."